

# Protecting our Waterways



The floodable photos by Joe Happing

Briekal Armstrong glues a notice to a downtown storm drain Friday in Columbus.

## Children push residents to prevent storm-drain pollution



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Dressed in yellow T-shirts and armed with pamphlets, 15 environmentally conscious kids flooded downtown Columbus Friday to teach the city about storm-drain pollution.

That problem happens when motor oil, soap, antifreeze, litter and other waste is washed from the pavement during rains and flows untreated into streams, lowering oxygen levels and killing wildlife.

The pollution is a misunderstood problem because many people incorrectly assume runoff from streets and parking lots passes through treatment plants.

The young activists, with the approval of city government, put "Stops to waterways" stickers on 48 drains downtown to raise awareness about the issue.

Byrne Bertrigert, a 9-year-old with silver plaques and a blond buzz cut, said the project made him learn he can make a difference in his community.

"People should stop and think before they start to litter," he said. "If all washes down the drain."

The stickers, green and blue and about 4 inches in diameter, mark more than 40 drains along Washington Streets and downtown.

Applying the markers during noon, a high traffic time in a high visibility area, was the culmi-

nation of a Water Quality Week workshop organized by Clifty Creek Watershed Project, kidscareers and Foundation for Youth.

The 9-, 10- and 11-year-olds also visited the wetlands at the Bartholomew County Landfill on Tuesday, sampled water quality at Clifty Creek and Mill Race parks Wednesday and toured Anderson-Palla on Thursday.

Watershed Project coordinator Elizabeth Trybala served as a teacher, motivational speaker and safety supervisor.

"This was an opportunity to talk about a current issue affecting Columbus and

Bartholomew County," she said. "We want these kids to be active participants."

Lisa Bales of the Department of Natural Resources Division of Soil Conservation and a cameraman from WYV1 Productions tagged along to film an educational video to be used statewide.

Bales said the event helps the county meet public education and outreach requirements under new

Environmental Protection Agency storm water rules.

The kids, in two teams, hung flyers on downspouts and under car windshield wipers. They also stopped pedestrians to pass out free bottled

- How you can help**
- Properly dispose of hazardous waste and recycle used motor oil.
  - Use fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides sparingly and follow the manufacturer's instructions.
  - Keep yard waste, trash and dirt off the street and out of the gutters.
  - Clean up after your pet.
  - Wash your car at a car wash facility or park your car in the grass before you wash it.

water and more flyers.

Every five minutes or so the group moved to a new storm drain, cleaned it with wire brush and applied a sticker.

The stickers are supposed to be nearly undetectable and impossible to remove, Trybala said.

Briekal Armstrong, 9, said her favorite part of the week was sampling Clifty Creek, where they removed five

flies.

"We're trying to save the water, and if we don't save the water we can't do anything now," she said.